

# ***Agenda: Perú* — Charting a Shared National Vision for the Future**



The *Agenda: Perú* project aims to help all citizens achieve their life goals. (IDRC Photo: N. McKee)

2001-03-23

*John Eberlee*

For the second consecutive year, Peruvians go to polls this spring to elect a new president — an election made necessary after last year's victor, Alberto Fujimori, resigned in disgrace. This time, citizens have been offered a bewildering number of choices. As of January 2001, there were almost a dozen presidential candidates "and no political parties," reports Francisco Sagasti, a governor of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and President of the Lima-based organization, FORO Nacional/Internacional.

While the current election sounds like a sure recipe for chaos and divisiveness, Dr Sagasti and his colleague, Max Hernández, a psychoanalyst and historian, have laboured since the early 1990s to articulate a shared vision of Peru's future that provides some needed direction for the impoverished country. The results of their project, *Agenda: Perú*, were summarized in a 350-page synthesis report published last year, and serve as an important backdrop for the current presidential campaign.

## **Broad consensus**

Based on an extensive public consultation process, the *Agenda: Perú* report outlines a vision of "what Peru can and should be as a country" over the next 20 years. It encompasses social, economic, environmental, scientific, and institutional goals, says Dr Sagasti. "We show that there is a broad consensus among the experts and citizens on the foundation for this strategy, and we try to indicate for political movements and groups what are the priorities for the next five years, what are the clusters of initiatives, what are the long-term urgent tasks, and how to initiate a transformation."

Available in print, on CD-ROM, and over the Internet, the *Agenda: Perú* report was distributed to each of the candidates in the current electoral contest. "We also gave this material to journalists, who are using the report to question the candidates. The politicians were told that this agenda is not meant to replace them, but to give them a framework from which they can decide what comes first,

what is the proper sequence, and how to allocate resources," Dr Sagasti explained during a seminar at IDRC headquarters. "At least they know that over the next 20 years, there is a broad-based consensus in Peru that this is the direction we should be going."

### **Country of lost opportunities**

"Over the last 50 years, Peru has been the country of lost opportunities," he stresses. "For a variety of reasons, we have lost out. Our GDP per capita between 1953 and 1975 rose steadily, but the trend for the last 25 years has been downward. More than half of Peruvians (55%) were born after 1975, and so most people have only seen a secular decline in their lifetime. Half of the population has been under the poverty line for 10 years in a row, and two-thirds have been underemployed or unemployed."

The roots of *Agenda: Perú* date back to the late 1980s. "We were planning to organize an active research program on Peruvian civil society and its relation to the political system," says Dr Hernández. "When we managed to get the program going, Mr Fujimori had organized his 'self coup d'etat'. At that moment, the prevalent view in Peru was that democracy was a hindrance to good government. So our first task was to see whether that apparently prevalent idea was really prevalent."

### **Sponsors**

The project was launched in 1993, with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), IDRC, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Tinker Foundation, the US National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and others. Stage one, from 1993 to 1995, involved a diagnosis of Peru's democratic governance problems and the setting of a research agenda. From 1996 to 1999, the team worked on specific topics, culminating in the synthesis report.

"Our methodology had three main components: integrative research, a consultation process, and dissemination of results," says Dr Sagasti. "In the first step, we reviewed the literature and used existing material and contributions to identify critical gaps in knowledge — for example, on the participation of youth in Peruvian politics, anti-poverty programs, and reform of the executive branch of government. As a result of our research, we prepared working documents, reports, drafts, and briefings, which were continuously revised," he adds.

### **Consultation process**

The consultations included in-depth interviews, workshops, informal meetings, breakfast briefings, and conferences attended by experts from civil society, the business community, and academic institutions, as well as government officials, and some politicians. This was followed by broader public consultations. "We visited 20 cities and 10 small towns in Peru. We asked people: 'How would you like to see yourself, your family, and your country 20 years from now.' We processed, analysed, and structured their responses, producing a kind of shared vision of the future, which we tested with focus groups and then with an opinion poll to make ensure we were capturing a consensus of the long-term vision of the country," says Dr Sagasti.

"We tried to go beyond what people were saying," adds Dr Hernández. "For example, in focus groups, a team of psychoanalysts sat behind a one-way screen to try and see the hidden basic assumptions in people's ideas about self-identity, governance, leadership, and [political] language. That enriched the way we tested our ideas."

## Common good

From these consultations, "we gleaned a description of the common good in which the objective is to expand the capacity of all Peruvians to freely imagine, design, choose, and realize their own life projects," says Dr Sagasti. Moreover, the project team was able to identify some of the conditions needed to help Peru meet its objectives. "One point that came out very clearly is there is no way we can move towards our vision and achieve the common good without democratic institutions," he stresses.

The *Agenda: Perú* report presents the complete vision, using a textile metaphor. "In Peruvian tradition, the textile industry has been very important over the years," says Dr Hernández. The document describes "how to create a social fabric that is tightly knit but open to [the world]. The design and colours are the manners in which, through democratic governments, Peruvians can achieve their cultural identity. The warp represents the transformations needed to achieve the vision, and the weft represents the strategic and policy directions for economic, social, and environmental transformations."

## Dissemination products

Besides the summary report, the *Agenda: Perú* team project generated 16 books. "We organized more than 100 events in 25 cities, made 200 presentations, and produced more than 10 hours of radio programs," notes Dr Sagasti. Other dissemination products include a comic book drawn by Peru's top cartoonist, published on a Saturday in the country's second largest daily newspaper. A popular book and a series of television programs are now being planned.

Both men are hopeful that their work won't be ignored by the next government of Peru. In fact, Dr Sagasti was recruited to head the platform committee for one presidential candidate. "I am in close contact with two other groups, and I know that if any of them gets into government, this is quite likely to be implemented as national policy," he concludes.

*John Eberlee is the Managing Editor of IDRC Reports Online.*

---

## For more information:

**Dr Francisco Sagasti**, FORO Nacional/Internacional, PO Box 18-1194, Lima, Peru; Email: [fsagasti@amauta.rcp.net.pe](mailto:fsagasti@amauta.rcp.net.pe)

**Dr Max Hernández**, FORO Nacional/Internacional, PO Box 18-1194, Lima, Peru; Email: [mhernand@agenda.org.pe](mailto:mhernand@agenda.org.pe)